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THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS: HISTORICAL AND
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN
THEATRE

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Keywords

British South Asian Theatre, Diaspora Theory, Postcolonial Britain, Racial State, Counter Public, Tara Arts.

Abstract

This article explores the historical and theoretical underpinnings of British South Asian theatre as a cultural product not only of, but also in response to, the un-resolved histories of British imperialism. The article combines diaspora theory, critical race and caste theory, and postcolonial legal history to suggest that British South Asian theatre cannot be read simply as a late arrival of a minority art onto a national stage. It did not arise from any other imperial paths of labour, war and administration than those of Britain itself, and it was not institutionalized until artists started to see the racial violence of the 1970s as a historical break that required a collective theatrical response. The conversation spans four interrelated themes: the theoretical shift from essentialist diaspora models to relational and processual models of identity; the racialisation of British citizenship in the wake of the postwar immigration laws; the ambivalent institutional recognition provided by Naseem Khan's 1976 report on 'ethnic arts'; and the establishment of companies like Tara Arts in the immediate aftermath of a racist murder in Southall. The article concludes by following the development of an initially disorganized network of local initiatives that became a network of interconnected cultural infrastructure that constituted a diasporic counterpublic in the 1980s and 1990s. The article adds to theatre



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	historiography by suggesting catastrophe as the most historically accurate lens for understanding the origins of this field, rather than heritage or celebration.
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INTRODUCTION

British South Asian theatre offers a constant challenge to historians: to tell its story as a success story of minority arrival, in which a previously marginalised community slowly gained recognition on a pre-existing national stage. This article doesn't fall into that trap. The term "British South Asian theatre" is not a recent invention of an already established national culture, but rather the conditions of possibility for it were created by the same imperial relations that had already connected Britain to the Indian subcontinent for centuries: war, indenture, maritime labour, colonial administration (Visram, 2002; Mongia, 2018). To treat the presence of South Asian actors in Britain as a novelty of the late 1980s is to miss the historical object at the very moment it becomes analytically significant: not when the migrant communities "arrived" in Britain, but when their presence became visible to, and contested within, British public institutions. This article suggests catastrophe as an organising historical category for that process of contestation. In this technical, not sentimental, sense, catastrophe refers to the cumulative ruptures created by empire, partition, forced and coerced migration, and racial violence, ruptures that cannot be solved by assimilation into an already established national narrative, nor be limited to a single trauma (cf. Rothberg, 2009, on multidirectional memory). Reading British South Asian theatre through catastrophe avoids two symmetrical errors: first, sentimentalising migration as an inevitable, cost-free enrichment of British culture; and second, flattening the extraordinarily varied histories of indentured labour, professional migration, Partition displacement, and East African expulsion into a single generic story of loss. A rigorous account, on the other hand, should not leave these histories in a state of productive non-equivalence, but should follow the way in which theatre practitioners themselves have made these silences audible through performance. The argument is in four movements. Section 2 presents the theoretical displacement of essentialist diaspora models, which are based on Hall (1990), Brah (1996), Gilroy (1993) and Clifford (1994) to make diaspora a relational category instead of an originary one. In Section 3, this framework is extended to race and caste, and intersectional theory, which suggests that any satisfactory explanation of the formation of British South Asian culture must not assume that "South Asian" is a homogeneous category. Section 4 examines the legal and administrative legacies of empire, and how the postwar British immigration system actively created the racial differences that theatre would challenge. Section 5 looks at the mixed institutional response to the report on minority arts provision by Naseem Khan in 1976, and Section 6 charts the origins of Tara Arts as a direct response to a particular historical catastrophe – the racist murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in Southall in 1976. The question of aesthetic form is directly addressed in Section 7, which builds on the work of Williams (1977), Daboo (2018) and Rancière (2004, 2009) to argue against the hierarchical distinction between "serious" and "popular" theatrical modes. In the next two decades, as described in Section 8, the various local projects were brought together in an interwoven institutional network that became a subaltern counterpublic, as Fraser (1990) calls it. The conclusion



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suggests that this history continues to have implications for the broader narrative of theatre studies about the formation of minority cultures.

THEORISING THE DIASPORIC STAGE: BEYOND ORIGIN AND LOSS

A theory of diaspora is implicit or explicit in any history of British South Asian theatre. Diaspora is often used as a synonym for exile from an authentic homeland, where cultural production in the diaspora is judged by the standard of an original, uncontaminated tradition. Since the 1990s, the field of diaspora studies has decisively challenged this essentialist model, and the challenge is important for theatre historiography because it alters the meaning of what practitioners' work is doing. In Stuart Hall's seminal essay on cultural identity and diaspora, the concept of identity does not refer to a stable essence "hiding inside" a culture, awaiting to be unearthed by cultural recovery (Hall, 1990). For Hall, identity is not a possession that can be retrieved whole from a previous, purer era, but is rather a construction and reconstruction of identity that is formed in the process of narration, and is influenced by relations of power and by difference. This does not imply that the past is infinitely inventable, but it does imply that access to the past is always mediated by the conditions under which it is remembered. Avtar Brah's related idea of "diaspora space" extends this relationality further, arguing that diaspora is not only the space of a migrant population. Diaspora space is a space of entanglements of those who have migrated and those who are constructed, often unconsciously, as indigenous; it is a space where racialised power plays on all those who inhabit it, whether or not they are diasporic (Brah, 1996). Analytically, this is to say that British theatre is a national institution, and that it is itself a part of diaspora space, rather than an unmarked backdrop against which diasporic performance takes place. James Clifford's influential reformulation further hones the point by suggesting routes as the governing figure for dispersed populations (Clifford, 1994). Diasporic consciousness is not about the possibility of eventual return to an unmediated origin, but about the unresolved tension between dwelling and travelling, between a desire for connection across distance and the discrepant, non-teleological histories that dispersal actually creates, on Clifford's account. This has direct implications for the reading of theatre practice: a play is not a sign of a temporary absence of an original culture, nor a mournful lament for its absence, but a path already walked, re-enacted. Paul Gilroy's account of the Black Atlantic provides an alternative argument to what he calls ethnic absolutism, the notion that cultures correspond to nations or to ethnic groups that are clearly defined (Gilroy, 1993). Gilroy's transatlantic paradigm shows how contemporary cultural forms are produced via routes, translations, and, in particular, histories of racial terror that are not contained within any single nation. In this reading, British South Asian theatre is not an import from elsewhere but another product of the same imperial circuits – of war, labour recruitment, and racialised violence – that produced modern Britain. Homi Bhabha's work on hybridity, mimicry and cultural enunciation adds another set of terms, as colonial authority itself was never complete or hermetically sealed: the repetitions and translations colonial discourse demanded created ambivalence in the colonising claim to authority (Bhabha, 1994). In the theatre, this ambivalence is manageable in terms of linguistic mixture, recontextualisation of canonical texts, double-casting, and



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the intentional clash of theatrical conventions, which can reveal the fragility of seemingly "authentic" national forms. However, hybridity, without an examination of institutional power, can be a formal or celebratory move. Rustom Bharucha's critique of intercultural theatre makes this materialist caution imperative, asking who has the power to appropriate, fund, tour and authorise cultural forms in the name of interculturalism (Bharucha, 1993). Ric Knowles further distinguishes between interculturalism "from below" (by artists who have first-hand experience of colonisation) and interculturalism "from above" (by already dominant traditions). This distinction is important because it helps to clarify whether formal hybridity is a way of redistributing representational authority or simply a way of restaging appropriation under a multicultural alibi (Knowles, 2010). Together, these theorists have laid the groundwork for the recognition of the aesthetic reality of cultural mixture on the British South Asian stage as inseparable from an examination of the material conditions of its production.

RACE, CASTE, AND THE LIMITS OF DIASPORIC SOLIDARITY

A proper British South Asian theatre history also cannot be tempted to assume that the term South Asian is an analytically and politically coherent term. The word itself is not just a geographical or genealogical term, but one that is also racialised; the history of its theatrical application is inextricable from the racial categorisations imposed by and contested within British institutions. The theory of racial formation by Michael Omi and Howard Winant is relevant here: race, according to Omi and Winant, is not a biological reality, nor is it an ideological construct, but rather a socially and historically constructed category that is continually being created and recreated through political struggle (Omi & Winant, 2015). Stuart Hall's related formulation, that 'race is the modality in which class is lived', the medium in which class relations are actually lived and fought over, explains why theatre companies from working-class and recently arrived migrant communities so often discovered race, not class alone, to be the primary category through which their marginalisation was organised (Hall, 1980, p. 341). Kimberlé Crenshaw's theorisation of intersectionality provides another needed corrective, as categories like gender, race, and class are not additive or separable systems of oppression, but rather they intersect to create historically specific and often unrecognised experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139–167). Crenshaw's framework focuses on structures that are invisible when gendered violence in diasporic communities is blamed solely on "culture" or when racism is examined without considering the internal patriarchal structures. Gayatri Gopinath's research on queer South Asian diaspora further illuminates this insight by demonstrating how nationalist and diasporic discourses of authenticity are mutually constitutive and how they together help to naturalize queerness as an importation, thus foreclosing queer diasporic subjectivities that she uncovers in popular music, literature, and film (Gopinath, 2005). This analytic tool is essential to any good discussion of a theatrical tradition that is organized around gender, sexuality, and generational conflict, as much of British South Asian theatre has been self-consciously. The treatment of caste is also very explicit, and its often-neglected presence in earlier narratives of British diasporic culture is an important historiographical lacuna. Suraj Yengde's account of caste as a structure that travels with



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migration, not disappearing when migration happens, is a reminder that both diasporic communities and host societies have often preferred to treat caste as a parochial, pre-modern residue rather than a live relation of power operating within Britain itself (Yengde, 2019). A theatre history that speaks about race but not about caste is a history that is speaking about the most socially privileged parts of the diaspora.

THE RACIAL STATE: EMPIRE'S LEGAL AFTERLIVES IN POSTWAR BRITAIN

The history of postwar British immigration law provides the material precondition, while diaspora theory provides the conceptual vocabulary, for understanding the relational, non-originary nature of British South Asian theatre. South Asian communities were not just "arrived" in a pre-existing Britain, but were produced and reproduced through a series of legislative acts that redefined British citizenship in explicitly racial terms. The British Nationality Act 1948 originally granted citizenship to a wide range of people throughout the Commonwealth, and defined subjects of Britain's colonial and post-colonial territories as citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies. However, this broad concept of citizenship quickly became politically problematic as large numbers of Black and South Asian subjects started to exercise their right to enter and settle in Britain (British Nationality Act 1948; El-Enany, 2020). The meaning of citizenship was increasingly restricted in practice through the introduction of employment vouchers, patriality requirements and other devices, the racially differential impact of which was widely recognised at the time, despite the fact that the legislation was formally colour-blind (Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962; Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968; Immigration Act 1971). Nadine El-Enany's legal history places this sequence in a longer argument about the racial state, which argues that Britain wanted to keep the economic advantages of its global reach, but reclassified many of the same populations that had made that reach possible as external actors who were not entitled to automatic citizenship (El-Enany, 2020). Ian Sanjay Patel's archival research on this legislative sequence shows that it was not a coincidence, nor was it simply a response to public pressure. The FCO records reveal that the British state was actively redefining British citizenship on a racial basis at the very time that the older imperial promise of common subjecthood was becoming increasingly problematic as decolonisation made it more convenient for the subjects to assert their citizenship in practice (Patel, 2021). Anti-discrimination legislation was then established under the Race Relations Act 1976, but this did not eradicate the racial state that immigration legislation had created, nor did it shift cultural power within British institutions (Race Relations Act 1976). Recognition and exclusion, that is, grew together, not one after the other. Theatre historiography is important to this legislative history because it sets the historical context for the organisation of British South Asian communities, including through cultural and theatrical means. Satnam Virdee's work on the 'racialised outsider' shows how successive waves of migrant labour were integrated into British capitalism through their partial exclusion from full citizenship, creating unique forms of political self-organisation among racialised working-class communities (Virdee, 2014). One of the most important forms of self-organisation was to be theatre. The early 1970s expulsions from East Africa, and the earlier phases of Partition-related displacement analysed



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by Yasmin Khan, further complicated the historical mix of Britain's South Asian population, making it impossible to represent the community that British theatre would eventually seek to represent with any single migration story, whether of labour recruitment, professional migration, or forced expulsion (Khan, 2007; Mongia, 2018).

FROM INVISIBILITY TO "ETHNIC ARTS": THE KHAN REPORT AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

In this legally created space of differential belonging, minority art production first appeared, if it appeared at all, in the British cultural institutions under the broad and somewhat simplistic term of "ethnic arts. The most significant change in this institutional context was the report commissioned by Naseem Khan in 1976, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, which surveyed the situation of minority arts provision throughout the country. Khan's report described the minority artistic activity as "an energetic but struggling sub-culture" that was constrained by a "lack of premises to rehearse" and similar institutional support for mainstream companies (Khan, 1976, p. 5). The importance of the report was not so much in any of its findings as in its fundamental argumentative move: it saw minority art production as a legitimate, continuous aspect of Britain's national cultural life in its own right, not an exotic curiosity outside that national culture, and deserving of the same institutional investment as any other aspect of theatrical practice. Dominic Hingorani has described the report as the first official recognition of the existence of a significant cultural formation at what had previously been regarded as the fringes of British theatre, but the exact institutional language Hingorani ascribes to this moment is, in the sources consulted for the present study, a matter for further page-level verification (Hingorani, 2010). The report's impact was real and direct, and directly informed future Arts Council policy and funding. But the institutionalization it began was a double-edged sword. Companies that were funded under the resulting "ethnic arts" or "ethnic minority arts" categories often found themselves restricted to programming, touring and critical frameworks that were based on ethnicity as the main or even sole interpretative lens, despite the artistic concerns of a particular company (Daboo, 2018; Dadswell, 2009). Institutional visibility, that is, was achieved at the price of a constant categorical marginalisation: minority companies were made "visible" as "ethnic" companies, and this meant that they were made "visible" as companies that were not part of the mainstream repertoire, but rather, part of a separate critical apparatus. This ambivalence has informed the institutional history of British South Asian theatre since. In his contemporary analysis of community arts and the state, Owusu Kelly places the Khan report in a wider context in which state cultural patronage both facilitated and limited minority cultural production, funding work that state institutions could count on and that was relatively unresponsive to work that went beyond those categories (Kelly, 1984). The theoretical apparatus outlined in Section 2 provides an explanation for this: a funding and critical infrastructure that is based on ethnic authenticity implicitly reinforces the essentialist diaspora model that Hall, Brah and Clifford's theoretical work explicitly challenges, in which minority theatre is seen as a representation of an



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origin, rather than as an active, relational cultural practice that is directly confronting contemporary British conditions.

CATASTROPHE AS ORIGIN: SOUTHALL, CHAGGAR, AND THE FOUNDING OF TARA ARTS

The Khan report provided one institutional condition for the emergence of British South Asian theatre, while a particular act of racial violence provided its immediate historical catalyst. Tara Arts, now established as Britain's longest running British Asian theatre company, was not established within the existing theatre institutions, drama schools, repertory companies or university theatre societies, but within anti-racist political mobilisation after a racist murder (British South Asian Theatre, n.d.-d; Chambers, 2011). The eighteen year old Sikh student Gurdip Singh Chaggar was stabbed to death outside the Dominion Cinema in Southall on 4 June 1976 (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism & Southall Rights, 1981, p. 51). The killing sparked anger among Southall's Asian community and a feeling that the initial response by the authorities did not take the murder seriously enough, as a racist killing should have been treated. The far-right politician John Kingsley Read, who was tried and controversially acquitted of incitement to racial hatred for his response to the murder at a public meeting the following week, further confirmed that the killing was racially motivated, saying "That was terribly unfortunate. One down, one million to go" (Institute of Race Relations, n.d.-b). The murder added to the racial tensions already generated by the increasing presence of the National Front in West London and by a long-standing history of racial harassment against Asian residents that had been documented by Southall's community organisations. The company's own institutional history states that "Tara Arts was originally started by a group of young [people] coming together after Chaggar's murder, who wanted to use performance as a means of making political and cultural comment on their experiences" (British South Asian Theatre, n.d.-d, "Companies" section). This origin story is historiographically important because it situates the founding impulse of Britain's most important South Asian theatre company in a particular, dateable act of collective political response to racial violence, rather than an established artistic vocation, which is precisely the kind of historical catastrophe this article has suggested as an organising category. The first production, a staging of *Sacrifice* (Balidaan) by Rabindranath Tagore at Battersea Arts Centre in 1977, should therefore be read not as a celebration of cultural heritage, but as a statement, made in the context of acute historical urgency, that South Asian artistic and intellectual traditions had the authority to speak directly to contemporary British political conditions (Chambers, 2011; Ley & Dadswell, 2011). It was a founding impulse that would be theorised by long-serving artistic director of Tara Arts, Jatinder Verma, who would go on to develop what he called 'Binglishing' – a conscious aesthetic practice of translating and recombining British and South Asian theatrical languages, rather than simply presenting South Asian material in the context of British dramaturgical conventions (Verma, 1998; Hingorani, 2004). The company's refusal to see migration as a demographic issue that could be explained sociologically is captured by Graham Ley's influential characterisation of the resulting body of work as a "theatre of migration" (1997, p. 349),



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which suggests that migration was the aesthetic condition through which the company developed new performance languages, rather than assuming that "authentic" cultural forms exist only in an unmediated South Asian past. This theatrical mobilisation has been linked to the broader history of Asian Youth Movement activism in industrial towns across Britain from the late 1970s, which organised direct community self-defence against racist violence alongside sustained campaigns against discriminatory immigration law (Anoop Chandola, 2013; Anandi Ramamurthy, 2013).

POLITICAL AESTHETICS: FORM, POPULAR CULTURE, AND DISSENSUS

The narrative that has been followed so far poses an interpretive challenge that theatre historiography cannot ignore: how to assess the various forms of dramatisation that emerged in this field, ranging from adaptations of canonical South Asian literature to popular Bollywood- and bhangra-inflected staging? Raymond Williams's cultural materialism provides a welcome counterpoint to the hierarchical divisions between "serious" and "popular" theatre that have frequently shaped critical and institutional responses to British South Asian theatre. A commercially produced entertainment can, in Williams' terms, embody a community's collective memory and its own language of address as well as any subsidised, critically respectable naturalism, even when the latter is accorded more prestige. This is a hierarchy of taste, really a description of relative institutional standing. The theoretical claim is given historical substance by the Bollywood- and bhangra-inflected staging that is documented by Jerri Daboo in British South Asian theatre. Forms that are often overlooked in subsidised theatre culture as simply diasporic popular spectacle have in practice been a key vernacular in which companies have negotiated market demand, generational address and public visibility, from large-scale Bollywood revue to hybrid stage musical forms that borrowed at the same time from South Asian popular cinema and British musical theatre conventions (Daboo, 2018). This scholarship argues that any historiography that emphasizes literary drama over popular performance-based forms of drama is likely to repeat the institutional structure that limited earlier "ethnic arts" funding to categories that were "readable" to metropolitan cultural gatekeepers, as described in Section 5 above. Jacques Rancière's description of the "distribution of the sensible" provides another theoretical tool for analyzing the political stakes in these formal decisions. Politics, for Rancière, is not just about who is allowed to be seen and heard in a particular social order, but also on what terms: aesthetic form is never just decorative, but is actively involved in the process of making subjects and experiences visible or invisible in a common perceptual and political space (Rancière, 2004). His related description of the "emancipated spectator" also argues that viewers are not mere consumers of pre-given political messages but active interpreters whose reception is not fully under the control of the producers of a production, regardless of its didactic aims (Rancière, 2009). This framework can help to account for the British South Asian theatre's consistent rejection of the didactic and documentary approaches to political theatre, even in the face of obviously political issues like racist violence, immigration law, or communal conflict. A similar dynamic is described by Baz Kershaw's related account of theatre as a form of "cultural intervention" which is able to change the ideological common sense of a particular historical moment without becoming a



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"propaganda" (Kershaw, 1992). This theoretical framework helps to explain why the institutional history outlined in Sections 5 and 6 is not a straightforward narrative of progressive inclusion. Formal innovation – the use of a hybrid Bollywood-influenced staging, intercultural recombination of British and South Asian dramaturgical conventions, and the Bilingualism – was a sustained intervention into the distribution of the sensible within British theatre culture, contesting not only who appeared on stage, but which historical experiences and modes of address were theatrically and politically legible in the first place.

THE EXPANSION OF THE 1990s: BUILDING A COUNTERPUBLIC: INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS

By the early 1990s, the geographically dispersed, locally organised responses to specific historical conditions had coalesced into something more systematic: an interconnected cultural infrastructure through which British South Asian communities negotiated questions of citizenship, memory and cultural authority on an ongoing institutional basis (Chambers, 2011; Ley & Dadswell, 2011). This consolidation is given a clear theoretical label by Nancy Fraser's concept of the "subaltern counterpublic. Fraser argues that the bourgeois public sphere, as described by Habermas, is a space of rational-critical discussion that is supposedly open to all citizens, but in practice excludes gender, race, and colonial status, which Habermas's model does not consider (1989). In the absence of or when formal inclusion in a dominant public sphere is denied or undermined, marginalised groups create alternative spaces of their own, arenas in which they can develop their own accounts of who they are and what they need before they are ready to challenge the dominant public sphere on its own terms (Fraser, 1990, p. 67–68). The rehearsal rooms, touring circuits and independent companies of British South Asian theatre did just this in the 1980s and 1990s: they were spaces where a nascent sense of what it meant to be a postcolonial British Asian could be debated within South Asian communities, before and in parallel to any debate conducted before a broader national audience. Most importantly, this counterpublic was never a separatist enclave. Practitioners were not restricted to working in one company, but were in constant flux between Tara Arts, Tamasha, Kali Theatre, the Hounslow Arts Cooperative, Mán Melá and mainstream theatres such as the Royal Court, Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the National Theatre. This pattern can be analysed with the aid of Pierre Bourdieu's description of cultural production as a relatively autonomous social field, in which aesthetic innovation, institutional relationships, and symbolic capital flow independently of any particular producing organisation (Bourdieu, 1993; Ley & Dadswell, 2011). When read this way, the individual theatre company is no longer the obvious unit of historical analysis, but rather the wider network of collaboration, mentorship and shared personnel that connects them. Other institutions, not South Asian theatre companies themselves, also contributed to the creation of this ecology. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Watermans Arts Centre, led by cultural director Hardial Rai, served as a hub for the development of many new companies and practitioners, offering rehearsal space, programming and administrative support. It was an early forum for the discussion of sexuality and gender identity, and was used to discuss this material before mainstream multicultural



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programming was ready to do so (Ley & Dadswell, 2011). A further important development in this growing area is the move from theatre as a means of gaining institutional recognition to theatre as a means of historical narration, a move that Dominic Rai's Mán Melá Theatre Company, established in 1993, exemplifies, with its focus on the creation of new forms of shared theatrical memory, assembling the fragments of British South Asian experience that are dispersed across the globe. This consolidation established the institutional and conceptual framework for the developments explored in the following chapters of this study: Tamasha Theatre's dramaturgy of family memory, Kali Theatre's feminist reconfiguration of the field's political grammar, and the increasingly differentiated aesthetic traditions that emerged by the end of the century to define British South Asian theatre.

CONCLUSION

A history of British South Asian theatre cannot be told in terms of the arrival of minorities and their eventual institutionalization. Theatrical field emerges instead as a direct product of the unresolved afterlives of empire: a set of communities whose presence in Britain long predated their formal recognition as British, whose citizenship was actively and deliberately narrowed by postwar legislation even as institutional structures such as the Arts Council began, ambivalently, to fund their cultural production, and whose most historically significant theatrical institution, Tara Arts, was founded in direct response to a racist murder rather than through any conventional route into professional theatre. This is a more historically specific organising category for this field than celebratory stories of multicultural enrichment or sociological accounts of migration, as it is a category of catastrophe, in the specific historical sense proposed here, as cumulative, non-equivalent rupture produced by empire, partition and racial violence. It enables historians to consider the structural violence that gave rise to British South Asian communities' unique relationship to citizenship and cultural authority, as well as the specific historical agency that enabled practitioners to create new theatrical languages, such as Tara Arts' Bilingualing, and the counterpublic infrastructure that by the 1990s had made British South Asian theatre a fully formed and internally differentiated part of national cultural life. This historiographical debate is not confined to one theatrical tradition. In a field of theatre studies that is increasingly concerned with the cultural afterlives of empire in various national settings, the history of British South Asian theatre offers a counterintuitive way of thinking about minority cultural formation, as a process not of gradual assimilation into an already-established national culture, but as a process of the national culture's own historical formation. The task for future scholarship, to which the chapters that follow this study's larger project turn, is to trace the continuation of this foundational history in the aesthetic and institutional development of the field in the decades that followed and into the twenty-first century.

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